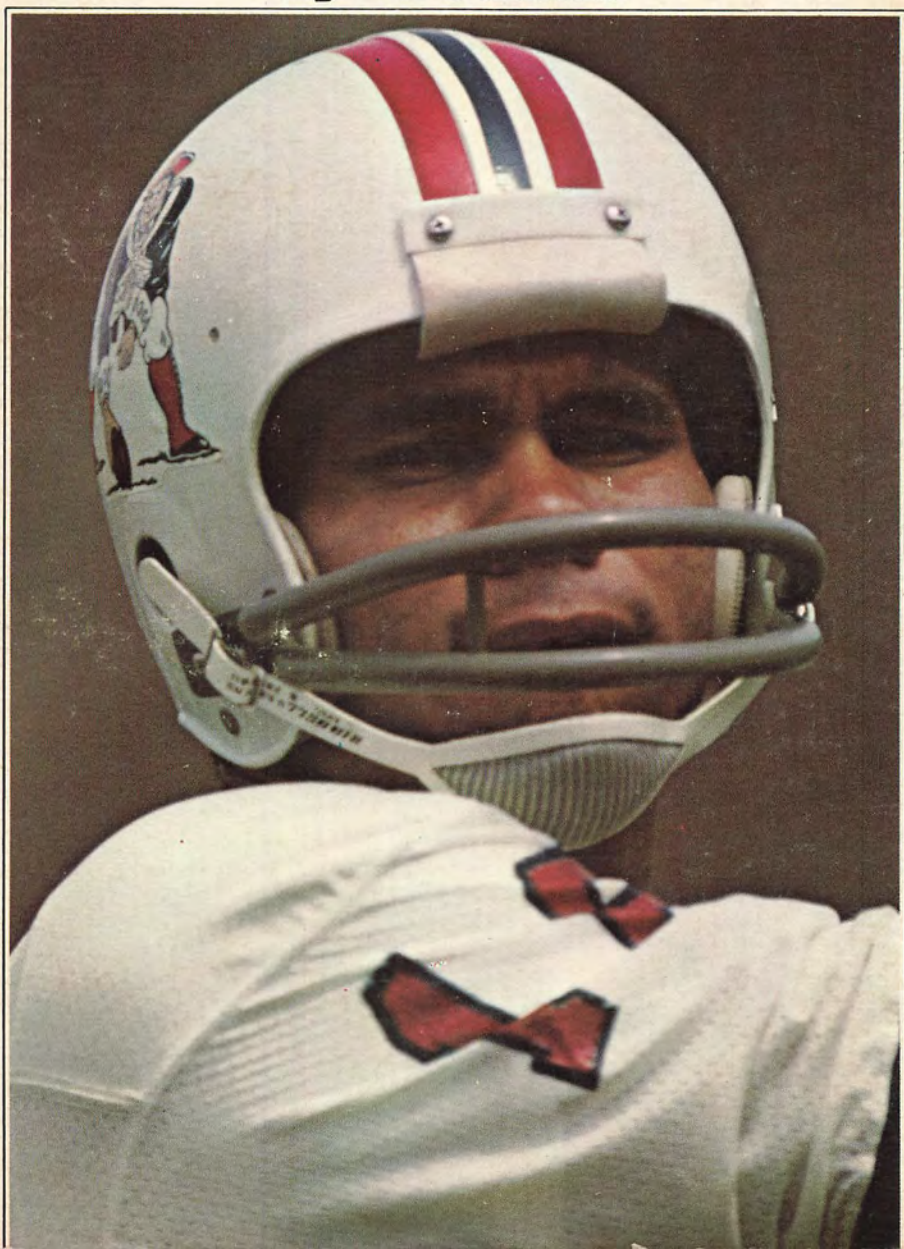


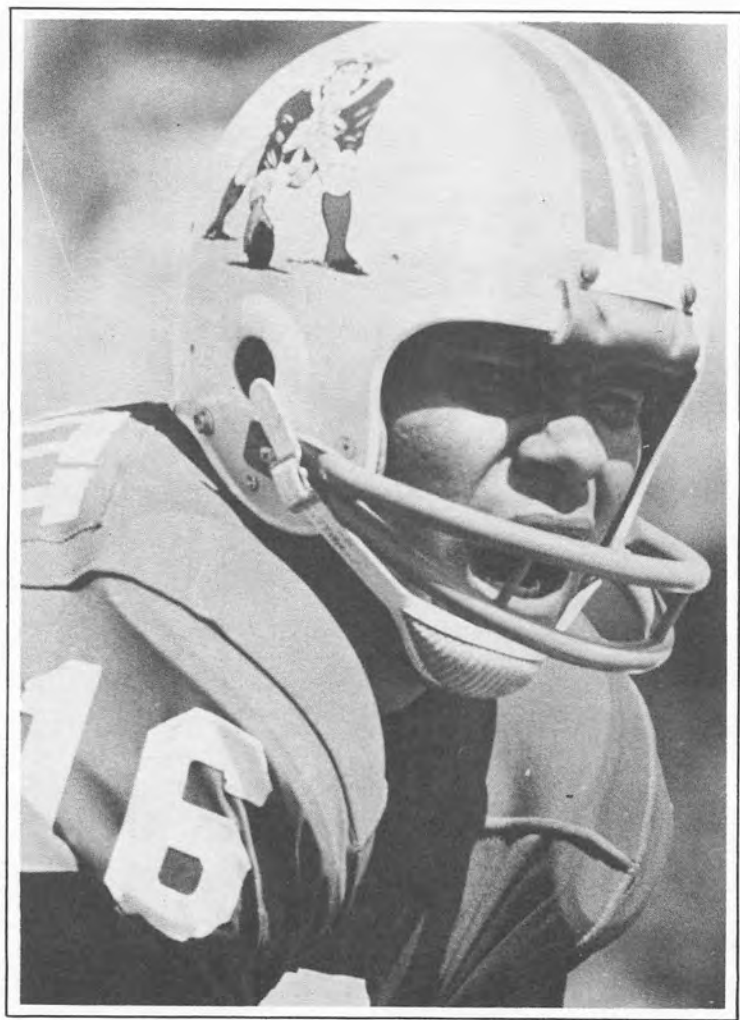
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Jim Plunkett

by Bill Gutman



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A THISTLE BOOK

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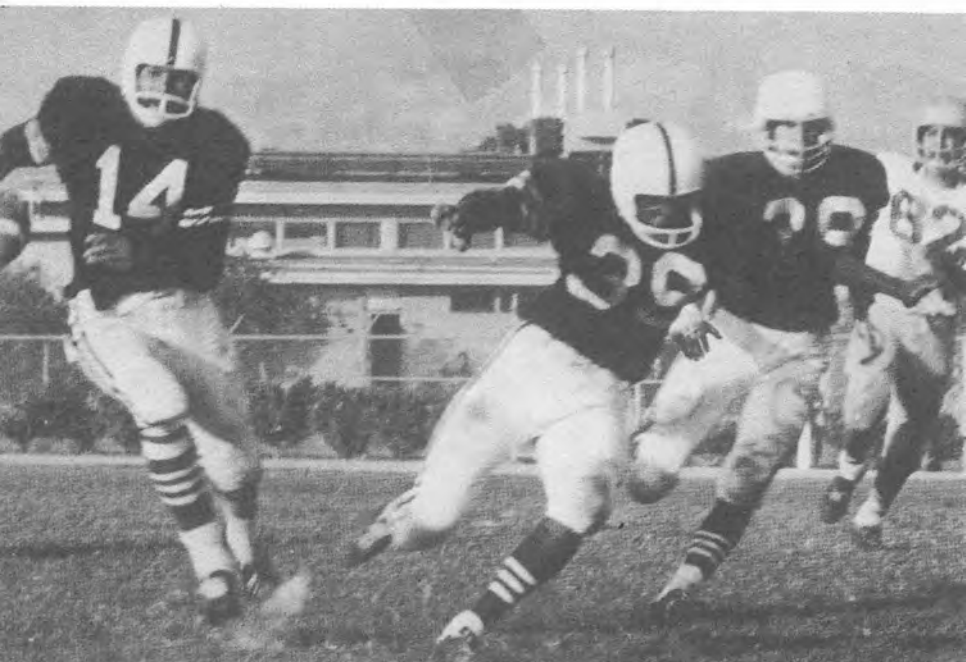
For the best fourth grade teacher I know.

CHAPTER 1

When Jim Plunkett was ten years old, no one knew that he would someday be a star quarterback.

Jim didn't know it, either. He just liked to play football.

Jim Plunkett was born on Dec 5, 1947, in San Jose, California. The weather in San Jose is warm and sunny. It rarely rains. A boy can play football anytime he wants. Young Jim liked San Jose. He had



Jim (No. 14) goes for yardage for James Lick High. He led his squad to two consecutive championships.

many friends, and he never wanted to be anyplace else.

But Jim was different from many of his friends. He was a Mexican-American. That meant his family was from Mexico. Now they lived in the United States. Sometimes Mexican-Americans are treated poorly by other people. They have trouble finding jobs, even though they want very much to work. There are many Mexican-Americans in California. They are working hard to help each other and to be respected.

Some Mexican-American children speak Spanish instead of English. This makes school more difficult for them. But Jim was lucky. His parents taught him English. So when Jim started going to school in San Jose, he could understand what people said.

“I enjoyed my early days at school,” Jim says now. “I got along well with all my classmates and we had a good time. There were never any problems for me because I was a Mexican-American. But I guess I was luckier than some kids.”

There was another thing that made Jim different from his friends. Neither of his parents could see. They were blind. His mother, Carmen, lost her sight when she was 20 years old.

Jim’s dad, William, was also blind. He worked selling newspapers in San Jose. He was often at the main post office, where many people knew and liked him. He made enough money for the family to live on. But if the children wanted extra money, they had to go out and earn it.

“I used to work at a grocery store after school,” Jim says. “I did odd jobs, made

deliveries and helped clean the place up. At other times I sold newspapers and also worked at a gas station. When I got older and stronger, I did construction work. That was hard. We were always digging, or lifting or carrying heavy things. But I made more money, so the work was worth it."

All the Plunketts enjoyed being together. Jim was very fond of his parents and two sisters. He didn't think he was missing anything when he stayed home.

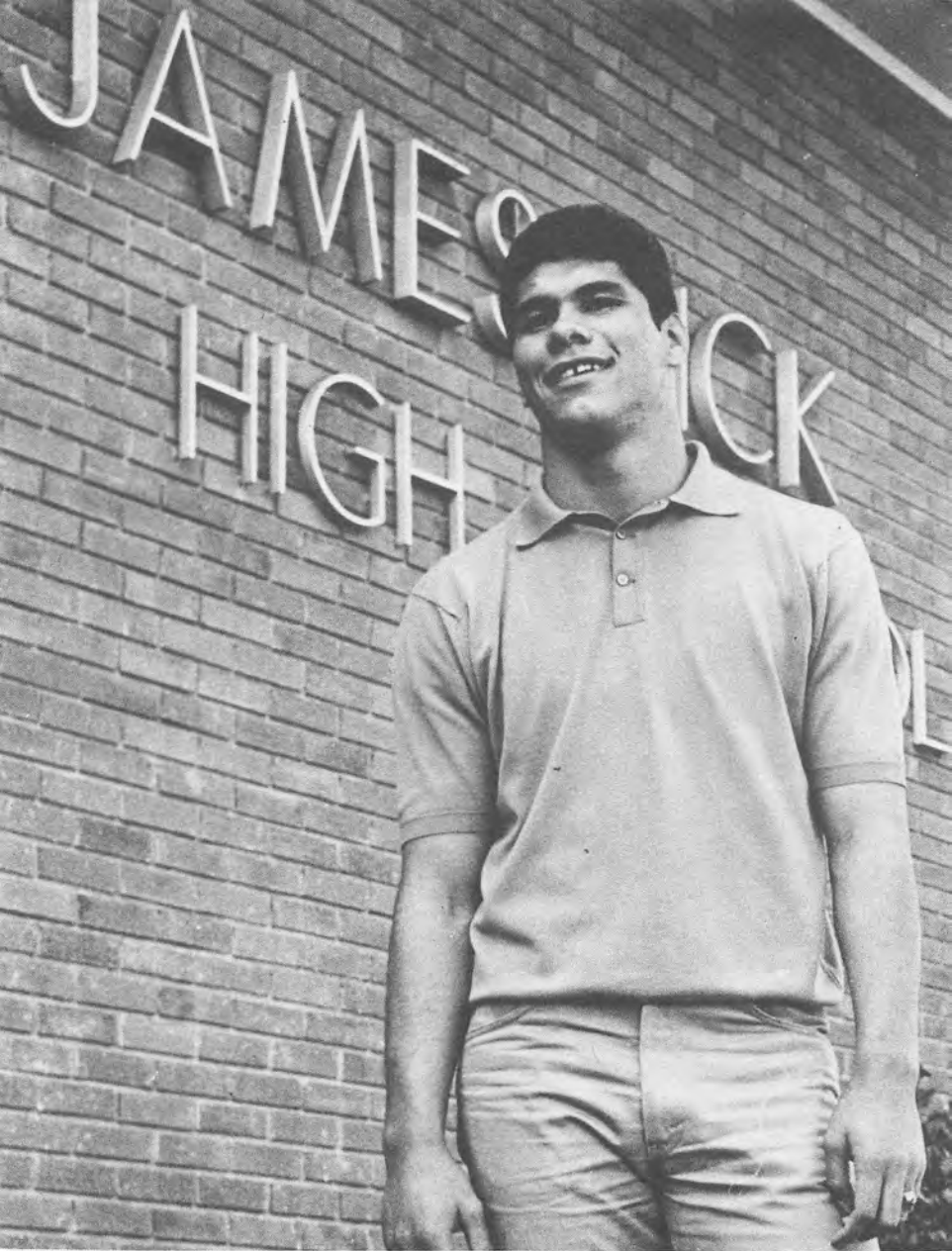
Jim went to Mayfair Elementary School. He was very popular with the other boys. He was always big for his age and a good athlete. So he quickly became a leader at the playground and in gym class. When he was in the fifth grade, Jim played football for the first time.

"We only played touch-and-flag football then," Jim says. "They didn't let ten-

and eleven-year-olds play tackle. But that was good. We could learn about the game and not risk a serious injury. It was still a rough game. I hurt my ankle in the sixth grade and had to play guard because I couldn't run well enough to play in the backfield."

Jim was eleven years old when he watched his first professional football game. It was the championship game between the New York Giants and the Baltimore Colts in 1958. The game went into overtime and to this day is often called the greatest football game ever played. It was a great way for Jim to first see professional football. The game had all the excitement and tension that anybody could possibly hope for.

But like most boys his age, Jim liked all the sports. He played baseball right through high school. He also liked foot-



In 1965, Jim was named to the All Central Coast Section football team. That year he led all preps in total offense.

ball, basketball and track. When he started in Lee Matheson Junior High as a seventh grader, he was looking forward to the football season more than ever before. That's when he got some bad news.

Jim's knees had been bothering him for some time. He found out that he had a temporary bone disease that sometimes affects youngsters who grow quickly. The doctor said it would go away, but Jim couldn't play any contact sports. That meant no football. So he just played baseball that year. As his knees got better, he waited for the next football season to begin.

When Jim returned to Lee Matheson as an eighth grader, he was already 5-11 and 150 pounds. He was ready to try out for guard or tackle again when he made an astounding discovery.

"I found out I could throw the football," he said.

It was that simple. Jim Plunkett could throw better than anyone else in the whole eighth grade. So there was just one position for him to play. Quarterback. Soon he was the team's star player, and the team won the county championship.

Jim was also becoming an outstanding all-around athlete. He joined the wrestling team, was the star of the basketball team and competed in the triple jump and high jump for the track team. With his good arm, he was naturally a pitcher on the baseball team. And when he wasn't pitching, he was playing in the outfield.

Jim entered Overfeldt High School as a tenth grader. He already had a reputation as a big, strong kid and a fine athlete. But he was still too young for the varsity. He was quarterback of the junior varsity,

a team made up of players not good enough for the varsity, and boys like Jim, who were too young. Although he played every game, his knees had to be taped very tightly and he couldn't play his best. The team won four and lost four (a 4-4 record) before the last game was canceled when President John F. Kennedy was killed in Dallas.

"I really didn't have very much to boast about in those days," Jim says. "But I knew I could play better and was determined to prove myself the next year."

The next year Jim transferred to James Lick High School, also in San Jose. Jim was still growing, and by his junior year he was already 6-3 and weighed 215 pounds. At James Lick High School, Jim had a new coach, Al Cementina. Al became a good friend of Jim's.

54B



In 1966, Jim won the Thomas P. Ryan Scholar-Athlete Award, James Lick High School's trophy for all-around achievement.

“It’s really good to have a coach you can also call a friend,” Jim said. “Coach Cementina was like a father to me and I’ll never forget all the help he gave me during my high school years. I was lucky to have someone who took such a personal interest in me.”

Jim wanted to help his coach. He did it by playing great football. He ran and threw the ball like a pro. The James Lick team won eight games that year and lost only one. The team won the championship of the Mt. Hamilton Athletic League, and Jim Plunkett was one of the league’s all-star players.

Jim was so tall that he could see over the heads of most of the linemen playing in front of him. So it was easy for him to pass the ball. And his arm was so strong that he could throw the ball far without missing.

Jim was bigger than many of the tackles and guards on his team, although usually the quarterback is smaller than the linemen. Jim's size allowed Coach Cementia to play a trick on the opposition. He would take Jim into the visitors' locker room. Then he'd say: "Hey, you guys. This is our quarterback. Wait till you see our tackles!" The visitors figured those tackles must be monsters.

Jim's senior year was even better. He ran more and threw better. The team was unbeaten, with a perfect 9-0 record.

All year long, Jim was the star of the team. He was so strong that it was hard to knock him down. He threw the ball very well. One coach said he looked like a man playing with boys. That's how good he was.

Jim was named to the all-league team that year. He was going to play in the

North-South Shrine Game with the best high school players in the state. When the coaches for the all-star game saw how big Jim was, they told him to play at defensive end. Jim was sorry that he couldn't play quarterback, but he played the new position very well. Still, he knew he was really a quarterback. He would soon be a very great one.

CHAPTER 2

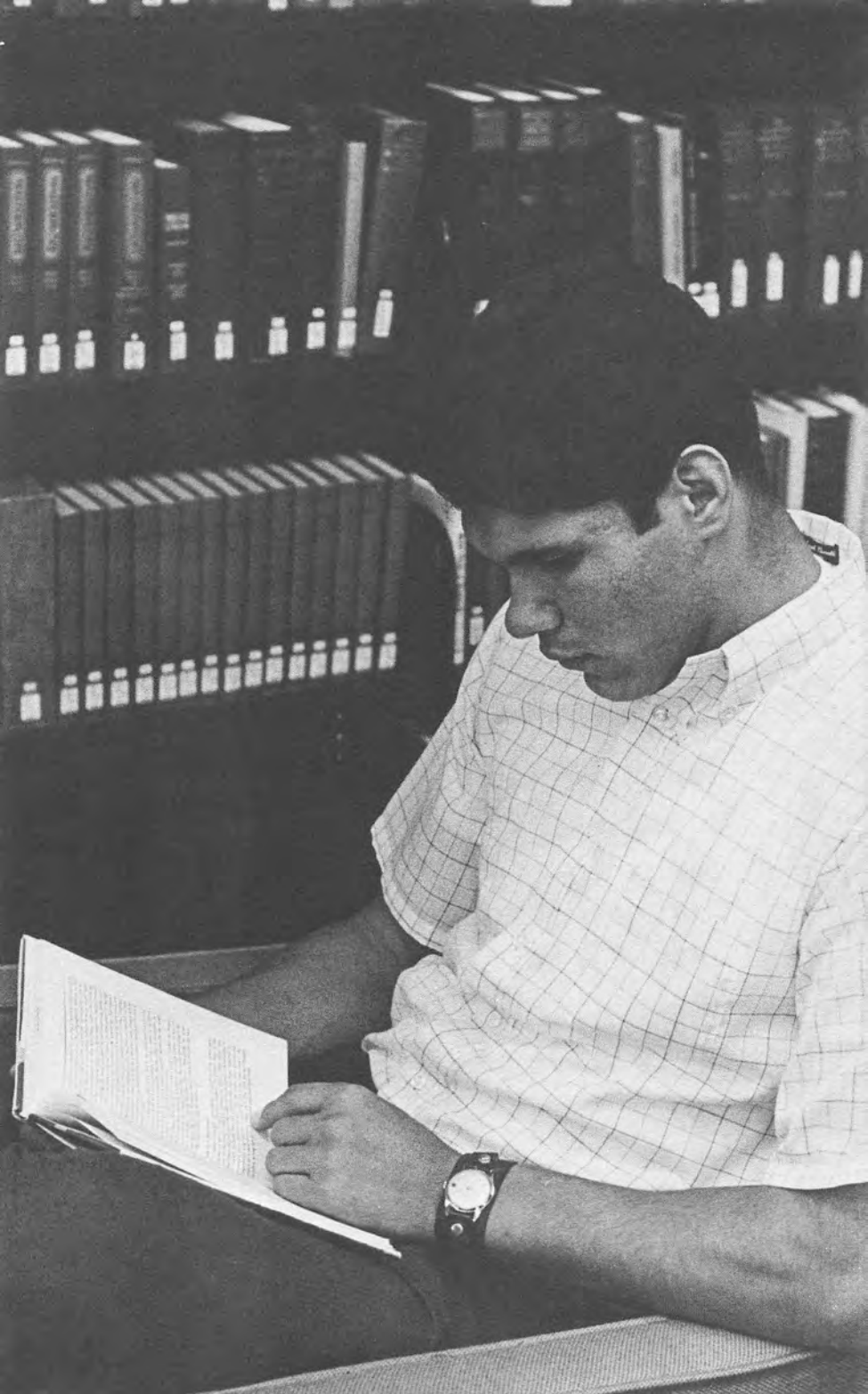
Most great high school athletes have a difficult time choosing a college. That's because many schools want to have the best athletes. So a lot of schools offer scholarships. It can be very hard to decide which scholarship to take. But Jim knew what kind of college he wanted. He wanted a college in California so that he could be near his parents. He also wanted to get a good education. He knew

that he could only play football for a few short years, but an education lasts forever.

That's why Jim chose Stanford University. It is near his home town, and it is a very good school. Jim says: "The brand of football was good, too. The choice was hard. And I had a good friend in Al Cementina, my high school coach. I could talk to him and he gave me good advice. That always helps."

Stanford has a big, beautiful campus and thousands of students. Jim was proud to be there. He was very happy when he went to take his physical exam. But then he got some terrible news.

The doctors told Jim that he had a tumor in his neck. Tumors are hard growths of tissue. No one knows how they start. Some tumors are more dangerous than others. The doctors have to



operate to find out what the danger is. At first Jim was scared. He did not want to have an operation. But he had to.

Jim was lucky. The operation showed that the tumor was not dangerous. It wouldn't spread once it was removed. Jim would be all right. He'd be able to play football again.

Unfortunately, Jim had to rest after his operation. He missed most of the games that year. At the end of the season, he played in three games. But then he didn't play very well. He had not been able to work long enough with his new teammates, and this is very important for a quarterback.

Jim was sad. He was determined to play better in spring practice. He wanted the coach to choose him for the next year's team.



Jim worked very hard that spring. But the coach didn't choose him. Jim only made the third string. Stanford had two quarterbacks playing ahead of him. They were Chuck Williams and Mark Marquess. Late in the season, Williams got hurt. Jim thought he'd get a chance to play. But there were just two games left. Stanford Coach John Ralston told Jim that he should not play at all. Then he could be a "redshirt."

A "redshirt" is someone who misses the whole season, then can play a whole extra season later. Jim decided to be a redshirt. That way he still had three seasons left to play.

Even so, Jim was a little upset to be a "redshirt." He knew he was a good quarterback, but still hadn't proved it at Stanford. Some of the coaches wanted to make him a defensive end, but he insisted

on remaining a quarterback. He knew he could do the job.

When the 1968 season started, both Williams and Marquess had graduated. The coaches told Jim he could be the quarterback. But they said he'd have to be good. Jim was determined to succeed.

On September 21, 1968, Stanford played against San Jose State College. Jim gritted his teeth and trotted onto the gridiron. His college football career was about to begin.

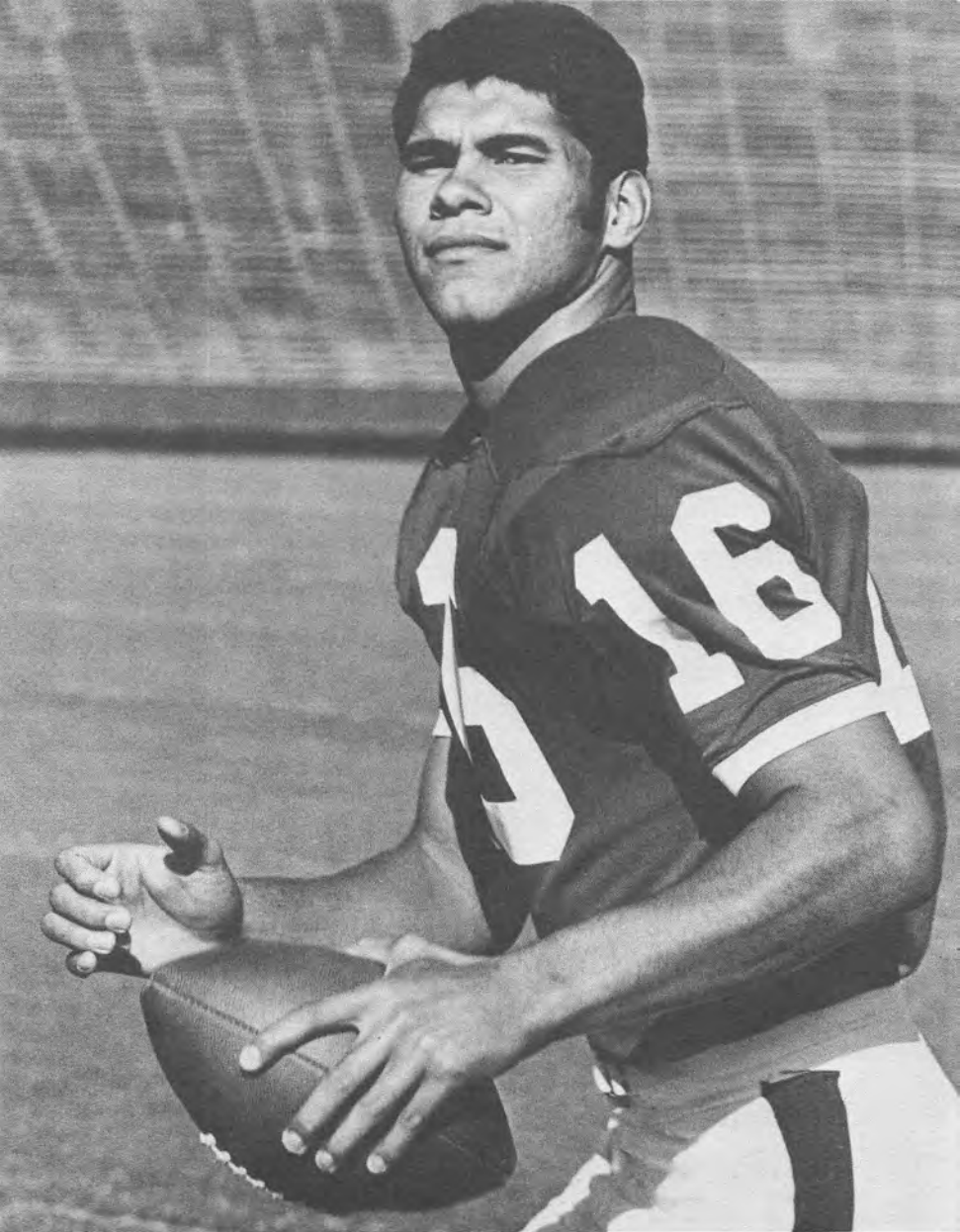
The first time his team got the ball, Jim took command. He threw the football like a bullet to his ends. He made perfect handoffs to his backs. His timing was perfect. His teammates realized they had a new leader and a great quarterback.

Four of Jim's passes were caught for touchdowns in the San Jose State end zone. Jim completed 10 passes in 13 tries

for 277 yards and four touchdowns. Stanford won the game by 68-20, a very high score. It was a great game for Jim. For the first time since he had come to Stanford, he was very happy.

There was another reason that he was happy. Coach Ralston told Jim that the team would be passing more. That's because the coach knew he had a quarterback with a powerful arm. He also said Stanford would play the game the way the pros do. The coach wanted Jim to drop straight back to pass. That's how the pros do it. Most college quarterbacks "roll out," running in one direction or the other before throwing.

Jim explained what the new style of play would do for him. "Being a drop-back passer will help me in several ways," he said. "It will make me a more accurate passer and will cut down the chance of



injury. Also, it gives me good practice if I want to play pro ball someday. We really have a pro-type offense now.”

The team had a very good year. They won 6, lost 3, and tied 1. Jim had a good year, too. He completed 142 passes in 268 attempts for 2,156 yards and 14 touchdowns. He passed for more yards than anyone ever had in the history of the Pacific Eight Conference, the league in which Stanford plays.

Jim was a star when he began his junior year. Everyone expected him to get even better. He was big and strong, with curly black hair and a rugged face. Jim Plunkett looked like a leader, and he was. Stanford's first game was against San Jose State college. Jim's team won, 63-21. Then two weeks later, there was a game Jim will never forget.

That was the game with Purdue University. The Purdue "Boilermakers" had a very good quarterback named Mike Phipps. Football fans wanted to see who was better: Plunkett or Phipps.

Jim led his team well. He completed his passes, and he called smart plays. The Indians had a good lead. Then suddenly Purdue seemed to change. Mike Phipps began to look better than Jim.

Phipps couldn't miss. He threw the football thirteen times, and every time he connected with pass receivers. Meanwhile, Jim began missing his receivers. The Purdue defenders were rushing him hard. They didn't give him the split second that a quarterback needs to find his receivers and throw the ball to them.

It was hard to believe, but Purdue managed to tie the score. The kick for





Will Jim make it through that hole?

the extra point was good, and Purdue won the game, 36-35.

Jim was heartbroken. He had completed 23 passes for a gain of 355 yards. He also ran the football for 61 yards. His total offense (passing and running) of 416 yards was a new conference record. The only thing wrong was that Purdue won the game.

Jim Plunkett doesn't like to lose. He was determined to win the following week. Stanford was going to play the University of Southern California (USC). It was a very tough team.

Once again, Jim passed very well. He completed 25 of 37 passes for 296 yards and two touchdowns. As time ran out, Stanford held a slim one-point lead, 24-23.

The fans thought the game was over. But the referee said there was time for

one more play. The USC Trojans had the ball. It was at the Stanford 24. They decided to try a field goal. It was a long way to kick. But the Trojans had a very good kicker named Ron Ayala. Play began. Ayala booted the ball at the 31-yard line. It went up, high and long—and GOOD! USC had gotten three points! It was an unbelievable ending. Stanford had lost its second close game in a row. The final score was 26-24.

Jim and his teammates were upset for the rest of the season. They won all their other games, and finished with a 7-2-1 record. But the two losses really hurt Jim and the other Stanford players. They vowed to have an even better season the next year.

Jim set many school and conference records in his junior year. He completed 197 passes in 336 attempts for 2,673 yards

and 20 touchdowns. His 113 yards rushing gave him 2,786 total offense yardage. All those figures are records.

Jim was becoming very famous. Football fans all over the United States knew about the Mexican-American quarterback from Stanford. They all wanted to see him play.

Jim had a very important decision to make. He could become a professional if he wanted to, because his original class had graduated. He was such a good player that any pro team would pay a great deal of money to get him. But Jim didn't turn pro.

"I decided to stay at Stanford," Jim said. "I had good grades since I started and wanted to complete my education. Plus I felt I owed something to my coaches and teammates. We had been working toward the league title and a

chance at the Rose Bowl. If I quit, I'd be letting them all down.

"I also believe people should finish what they start. My targets were my college diploma and to get my team to the Rose Bowl. I couldn't back out now."

Jim's decision took courage. He might get hurt badly in his last year at Stanford. If he did, the professionals wouldn't pay him as much money. Jim wanted the money to help his family. But he believed that "people should finish what they start."

CHAPTER 3

Many people praised Jim's decision to stay at Stanford. They respected Jim even more. One reporter said, "What he has is called 'character.' " And his coaches called him one of the fairest and most decent men they ever knew.

As for Jim, he started getting ready for another tough season. He was still angry about the losses to Purdue and USC the season before. He wanted to win this year.

“Those two losses really made me angry,” he said. “I was tired of people saying we lost all the big games. It wouldn’t happen again if I could help it. And I really wanted to beat USC this year.

“I think I’m a better quarterback this year. I can read defenses better and playing the pro set has made me a more accurate passer. We should be able to beat Arkansas in our opener next week.”

The Arkansas Razorbacks were one of the better teams in the country. But they couldn’t stop the passing of Jim Plunkett. Big Jim connected on 22 of 39 for 262 yards and a touchdown. And every time there was a big play, Jim was there to make it work. It was a close game, but Stanford held on to win, 34–28. Now the Indians were called one of the best teams in the country, and Jim was their number one star.





The Rose Bowl, January 1, 1970.

Stanford continued to play fine football. Purdue beat them again, 26-14, but the next week Jim led the Indians back against USC, 24-12. He had won the game he most wanted to win. Stanford went on to victories over UCLA, Oregon State and Washington. The Indians had won the Pacific Eight championship! They would play in the Rose Bowl game on New Year's Day, 1970. It would be the first time Stanford had been in the Rose Bowl since 1952. At the end of the season, the Indians lost their final two games to the Air Force and California. Now fans were wondering how Coach Ralston's team would do in the Rose Bowl. The Indians would be facing undefeated and top-ranked Ohio State.

But any team that had Jim Plunkett at quarterback had a chance to win. In his senior year, Jim had 191 completions



in 358 attempts. His passing gained 2,715 yards, and he threw for 18 touchdowns. He set many more records, including the most passing yardage (7,544) of any college player up to that time. (The record has since been broken by John Reaves of Florida.)

Jim was getting some kind of award almost every day. He won the Heisman Trophy and the Maxwell Award, the two top prizes going to the best college player in the country. He was the quarterback on almost every All-American and all-star team. He was truly the best college player in the land in 1970.

Jim showed everyone that he was a very special kind of person. When someone becomes as famous as he did, people are always asking questions. Many famous people don't want to be bothered, and they get angry. Not Jim. He was always

polite and friendly, and he answered everyone's questions with a smile. Wherever Jim Plunkett went, a crowd was sure to follow. Strangers wanted to shake his hand, get his autograph or just talk football for a minute.

Even when Jim went on vacation to a small island near Hawaii, where there was no television and no football, the people recognized him. It felt strange to be so famous, but Jim was happy. He was successful as a quarterback. He remembered the early days at Stanford, when one thing after another went wrong. He didn't ever want those days back again.

The last game of Jim's college career was the Rose Bowl. Jim wanted to win the game against Ohio State. It wouldn't be easy. The Ohio State Buckeyes were a big, tough team, with very good players. Many of them were All-Americans.



The Rose Bowl game was rough!

The Buckeyes had an excellent quarterback named Rex Kern. He was a good runner and ball-handler. They also had a powerful fullback named John Brockington. And their defense didn't let other teams score very many points. Most experts thought they'd beat Stanford.

A huge crowd of 103,838 fans jammed into the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, to see Stanford play against the powerful Buckeyes. They expected an exciting game.

Ohio State kicked off. The ball fell short, and Stanford got it in great field position. Jim called a running play, and the Stanford halfback gained good yardage. Then Jim faded back to pass. Looking over his blockers, he tossed to end Bobby Moore, who broke away and carried the ball into the Ohio State end

zone. It looked like a touchdown! But then the referee tossed his red flag into the air. He called a penalty against Stanford. The ball was moved back.

"We wanted to hit them fast," Jim said later. "We did, but the play was called back. We knew we had to move again, or they would have the advantage."

So Jim went back to work. He drove his team downfield again. This time he controlled the football with running plays and short passes. Stanford finally scored on the ground. The conversion was good, and the Indians led, 7-0.

The next time Stanford had the ball, Jim moved the team again. From the Ohio State 20-yard line he faded back to pass. He spotted little Randy Vataha in the end zone, and let fly. Vataha ran under the ball, caught it . . . and

dropped it! This time Stanford had to kick a short field goal, but they were ahead, 10-0, and it looked as if the Indians might upset the nation's number one team.

But Ohio State wasn't finished. Quarterback Kern finally got his team moving. He handed off to Brockington or half-back Leo Hayden, and sometimes carried the ball himself. Suddenly the Buckeyes were eating up yardage. The Stanford defense seemed confused. In no time, Kern led his team into the end zone for a touchdown. It was a 10-7 game. Then he did it again. The whole game had turned around. Ohio State was in front, 14-10. It was up to Jim Plunkett to get the points back.

It was now the fourth quarter. The Buckeyes had the ball, but the Indian defense held. On the sideline, Jim took

a deep breath. He'd waited four years to play in the Rose Bowl, and he didn't want to lose now. As he trotted onto the field, Jim knew what he had to do. He had to pass the football.

In the next few minutes, the game turned into Jim Plunkett's aerial circus. The football was flying through the noisy Rose Bowl air. Moore and Vataha were grabbing Jim's passes on the flanks. His backs were taking short tosses over the middle.

Then Jim fired the ball to Moore on the two-yard line. Stanford was knocking on the touchdown door. A play later, the team scored! They were back in the lead.

The Stanford defense saw how well Jim was playing. They knew they could play well, too. They went back onto the field ready to prove it. The Indian line stopped the Ohio State runners. When



Kern tried to pass, the secondary was waiting. A Stanford interception gave the ball back to Plunkett and the offense.

This time Jim looked for Vataha. He found his little receiver cutting into the end zone. He let the ball fly. TOUCH-DOWN! Plunkett had done it again. Stanford led, 24-14. The fans in the Rose Bowl screamed with joy. Each team made a late field goal, so the final score was 27-17. Stanford had upset the nation's top-ranked team. Jim Plunkett was again the best player on the field.

Jim completed 20 of 30 passes for 265 yards. He did it while he was up against one of the best defenses in college football. He proved all over again that he was the best college football player in the land.

Every reporter wanted to talk to Jim about the team's great Rose Bowl victory.

He smiled and joked as he answered the questions. It was the last time people asked him about Stanford and his college career. That was over, even though Jim played and starred in both the Coaches' All-American Game and the College All-Star Game that summer. But now there was professional football to talk about.

CHAPTER 4

It was no secret that Jim wanted to play pro football. A player as good as Jim doesn't say no to the pros and all the money they pay the star players. Plus Jim loved football. He always had. Only this time he couldn't make the choice of where to go.

In the pros, the different teams take turns picking college players. The team with the poorest record picks first. Then

the team with the second poorest record picks. And so on. When every team has picked one player, they start over again.

Jim was by far the best college player that year. It was obvious he would be picked first. The team with the poorest record was the New England Patriots. They had won only two games the year before. The Patriots wanted Jim and knew they could get him. But maybe they would trade him. If they traded Jim to another team, they would get maybe three, four or five players for him. That's how valuable he was. If the Patriots decided to keep him, they could try to build their team around the big youngster from San Jose. The Patriot Coach and General Manager made the choice. They picked Jim Plunkett.

Jim had mixed feelings about going all the way across the country. The New



Jim liked his contract with the New England Patriots.

England team played in Massachusetts, near the city of Boston. In fact, until they moved into a new stadium in Foxboro, Mass., the team was known as the Boston Patriots.

"At first I thought I'd like to stay in California and play for one of the teams there," Jim said. "But I know a pro has to play for the team that picks him. I just want to get in there and play, so it really doesn't matter. I'd like to play for the Patriots. And going all the way to Massachusetts, I'll be seeing a whole new way of life."

Jim had a very responsible attitude about his future. He already wanted to help his new team. General Manager Upton Bell knew Jim could help in many ways. Jim was a great football player. He was also the most popular college quarterback since Joe Namath. Bell thought

that a lot of fans would come to the stadium just to see Jim. What's more, Jim could make the Patriots a winning team.

But even after the Patriots drafted Jim, they thought about trading him. New England had a veteran quarterback, Joe Kapp. Kapp once led the Minnesota Vikings to the Super Bowl. He was paid a lot of money by the Patriots. Plunkett would also get a lot of money. The team didn't know if it wanted two high-priced signal-callers.

It was a tough choice again, but New England decided to keep Jim. Jim would share the quarterback job with Joe Kapp.

Jim came east to settle on his contract with the Patriots. It was the same kind of contract given the top draft choices from the previous two years. They were O. J. Simpson and Terry Bradshaw. Like Simpson and Bradshaw, Jim signed a con-

tract for \$350,000 or more. At the age of 23, Jim Plunkett would be making a lot of money. He wanted to prove he was worth it.

Before Jim could play for the Patriots, he had to play for the college all-star team in Chicago. Every year, the best college players meet the professional champions in a pre-season game. The college all-stars were beaten badly. That usually happens, because the collegians only have two weeks to practice together. Most scouts thought Jim played well, even though he didn't have much time to work with his receivers.

When Jim arrived at the New England training camp, he wanted to work with Joe Kapp. Jim knew that Kapp could teach him many things about professional quarterbacking. He wanted to work with the veteran and watch him in



Jim met Joe Kapp when he came to Boston to settle his contract terms.

action. But Kapp was gone. He had a dispute with the Patriots about his contract, and just walked out.

Jim was on the spot. Now he and an older player, Mike Taliaferro, were the only quarterbacks left. Taliaferro had never been a star, and it was obvious that Jim had a good shot at the starting job. But without Kapp to help, he'd have a hard time learning fast enough.

For the first few weeks, Taliaferro ran the first string. Jim tried to learn his new team's system and the plays. A professional team has hundreds of plays, and a rookie must learn them all by heart. Jim had to study very hard, but he enjoyed it and learned quickly.

When the pre-season games began, Taliaferro was the starting quarterback. Jim played for short periods of time. In fact, during the first two games with the

Giants and Vikings, Jim only threw 11 passes, completing five, with two interceptions. But the Patriots' coach, John Mazur, liked what he saw.

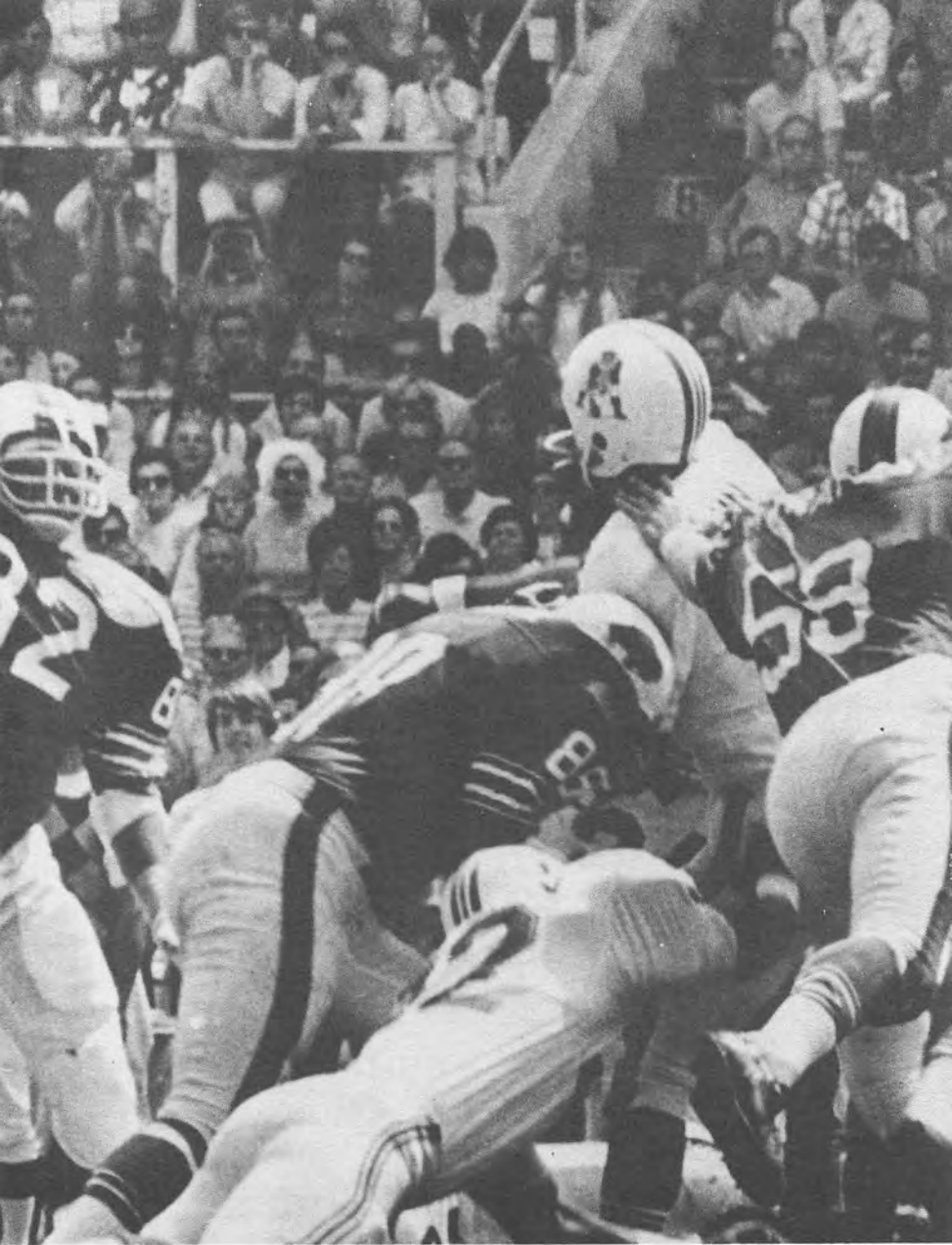
"Jim kept a cool head in the Giant game," the coach said. "We were ahead by 20-14, and I told him to run out the clock. If he didn't do it right, they'd get the ball and have a chance to score. But he did the job right."

In the middle of the exhibition season, the Patriots did something that made Jim very happy. They signed Randy Vataha to a contract. Randy was Jim's favorite pass receiver at Stanford. In the first NFL draft the Rams had picked Randy, but they decided he was too small. He was 5-9 and weighed 165 pounds. They let Randy go. Now he could play with Jim. The Patriots were going to be very glad they signed him.

When the regular season was just two weeks away, Jim got his first start. It was a game against Atlanta. Jim did as well as Taliaferro had done. The Patriot coaches knew that Jim would get better. They knew that Taliaferro would stay about the same. They decided that rookie Jim Plunkett would be the starting quarterback when the regular season opened. Jim had won himself a job.

Now the pressure was really on Jim. Many teammates and writers asked him about it. They told him about last year's top quarterback choice, Terry Bradshaw of Pittsburgh, and how he let the pressure get to him.

"I understand about Terry," Jim said. "There are things you do in college that you think you can do here. Then you find out they just don't work. It can be frustrating. But Terry and I are with



In the pre-season game with Buffalo, Jim stood up under a strong pass rush and got his pass off safely.



different teams, so you can't really compare the situations. And by the way, he's still going to be a great quarterback."

Opening day was approaching quickly. Most experts agreed that the Patriots would be a better team than last year. But nobody knew how much better. That would depend a lot on Jim. If he learned the pro game fast, the Pats would win. There was enough other talent to see to that.

Little Vataha had proven himself in the exhibition games. He was a starter at one wide receiver spot. Rookie Roland Moss was the new tight end. The running backs were veterans Jim Nance and Carl Garrett. Both Nance and Garrett were good players.

The Patriots had a good defense lineup, too. Rookies Julius Adams and Tim Kelly were starting on the line. The team

had a new linebacker, too. He was Steve Kiner, who came over from Dallas. Most fans agreed that the Patriots would be ready on opening day. It was too bad that their opponents would be the Oakland Raiders.

CHAPTER 5

Oakland had one of the real powerhouse teams in the Patriots' league. The Raiders were big and strong. They scored a lot of points, and their defense didn't allow many. It was a tough way for the Patriots to start the season. Most of the 55,405 fans who jammed into Schaefer Stadium thought the Raiders would blow the Patriots off the field.

In the first half, Jim played it very safe.

He wanted to get the feel of the pro game, and he didn't pass much. He just handed off to his runners, and tossed a few short sideline passes. The Patriot offense was playing dull football. But the fans didn't mind. The Patriot defense was giving them plenty of excitement.

To the surprise of everyone, the New England defenders were stopping the Raider attack. The young linemen were rushing quarterback Daryle Lamonica and making him throw badly. The only Oakland score was on a short touchdown run by halfback Pete Banasak. By halftime, Oakland held a slim, 6-0, lead.

"They haven't gotten away from us yet," said Patriot coach John Mazur in the New England locker room. "If we open up a little, we may take them by surprise." Coach Mazur meant that he wanted to see more passes.

Many Patriot fans thought the coach would put Taliaferro in the game for the second half. But he didn't. It was Jim again. The fans cheered, and it was clear that Coach Mazur believed in the big rookie from Stanford.

New England got the ball and started moving. Jim mixed his plays well, throwing more to his ends and backs. Most of his passes were still short. But he led his team in. Nance scored the touchdown on a run. Charley Gogolak kicked the extra point, and the Patriots led, 7-6.

Lamonica tried to get the Raiders moving. But the Patriot defense was too strong. They gave the ball back to Jim on his own 30-yard line, 70 yards from the Oakland end zone.

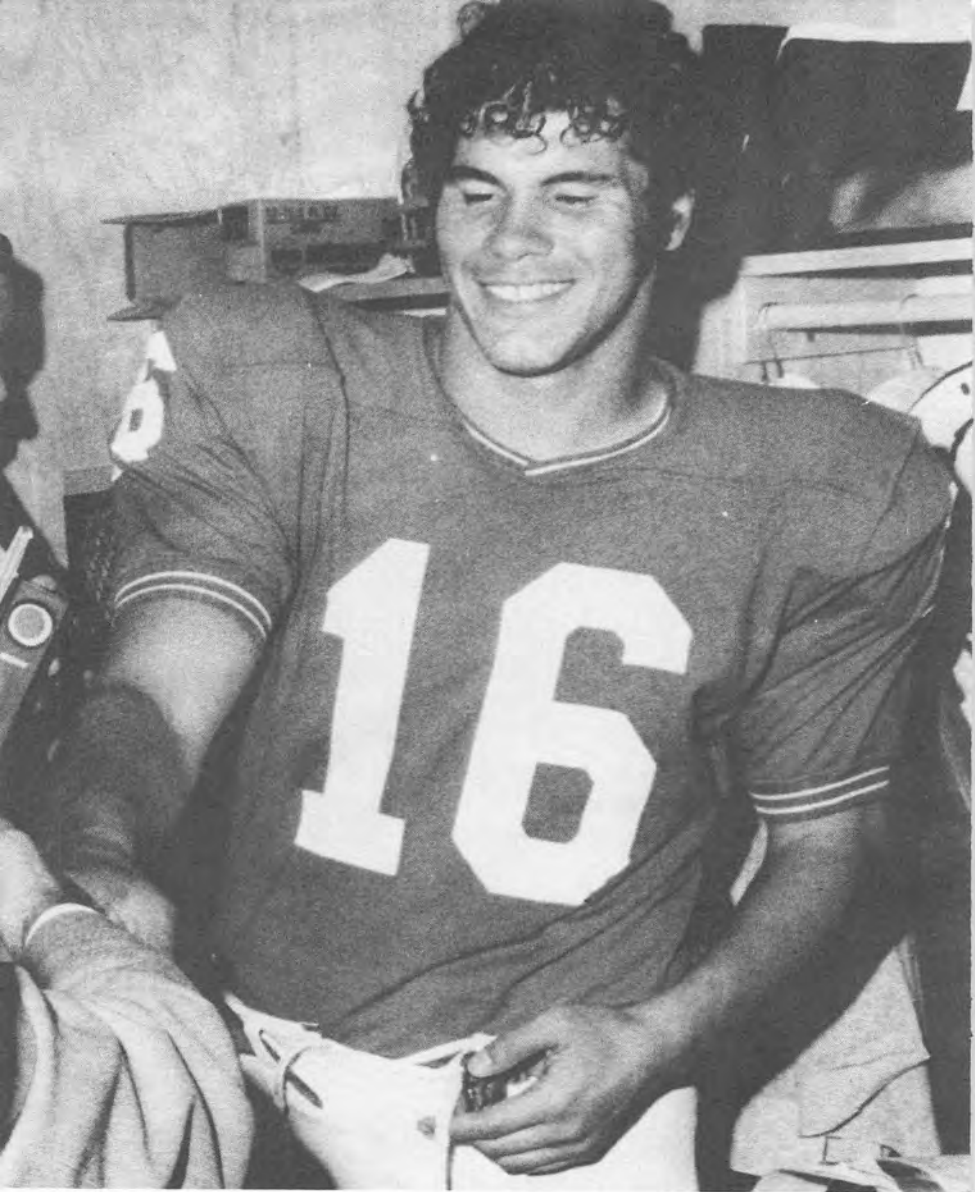
The Patriot offense began moving once more. On a third-down play at the 34, Jim dropped back to pass. He had good

protection from his line. He threw the ball high and far. Little Randy Vataha grabbed the pass, and ran all the way to the Oakland 27-yard line. It was like old times at Stanford for Jim and Randy.

The long pass gave Jim confidence. Two more running plays moved the ball to the 20. Then Jim decided to pass once more. He faked a running play to draw in the defense, then threw the ball to his tight end, Roland Moss. Moss grabbed the ball at the 10 and practically walked into the end zone. It was the first touchdown pass of Jim's pro career.

Gogolak kicked the extra point and later added a field goal, making the final score 20-6. Jim and the Patriots had won their first game. Jim completed just six of 15 passes, but he made them when they counted the most.

New England fans thought the team



After the Oakland game everybody wanted to shake Jim's hand.

was a miracle. But the miracle ended the next week. The Patriots were beaten badly by the Detroit Lions, 34-7. This time, Jim completed just six of 17 passes for 133 yards. The only good part of the game was Jim's 61-yard touchdown pass to Vataha. Otherwise, it was a bad afternoon, and Jim knew it.

"I wasn't very sharp out there today," he said after the game. "But you've got to forget these games once they're over. The losses you forget quicker than the wins. You've just got to be careful not to lose your confidence. A team without confidence can't possibly win ballgames. There's a certain type of mentality that a loser has. I don't want that to happen around here."

As usual, Jim had confidence. He knew he had to be a strong leader. If he wasn't,

the team would have another terrible season.

In the next two games, the Pats lost to the Colts (23-3), then beat the Jets (20-0). The fans knew what kind of a season it would be. The team would win ballgames, but they'd lose, too. There'd be no miracles. The fans just hoped that the team would win as many as it lost.

Jim's desire to win was obvious. After the loss to the Baltimore Colts, someone told Jim that Baltimore quarterback John Unitas was impressed by his play. Many people think Unitas is the greatest quarterback ever. The fact that he praised Jim should have made Jim happy.

"I admire Unitas, don't get me wrong," Jim said later. "But I'm not out to impress him. I'm trying to win games for the Patriots and get the guys here to go along

with me. That's the most important thing. Winning."

After the first four games, the Patriots went on the road to play three games at other stadiums. They lost all three. First Miami beat the Patriots, 41-3; then Dallas whipped them, 44-21; and finally San Francisco triumphed, 27-10. Now the team had lost five games and won just two. Things began to look really bleak. Even Jim was depressed.

After the loss to San Francisco, the 49er quarterback, John Brodie, had something to say about Jim.

"Jim Plunkett is great," said Brodie. "But he has to take charge of the Patriot offense before it will score a lot of points. Jim does everything well, but now is the time for him to do what he does best."

Brodie meant that Jim should pass.



In the San Francisco game Jim was all tied up by 49er Cedrick Hardman. At left: Patriots' Mike Montler.

Jim was still playing careful football. Brodie and several others wanted him to throw the ball more often.

The next week the Patriots were back in their own stadium. They played the Houston Oilers, and won, 28-20.

The following week, the Patriots were up against the Buffalo Bills. The first time the Patriots had the ball, Jim was hit hard by a Buffalo tackle. When he got up, he felt a shooting pain in the back of his left leg. He had pulled the hamstring muscle in his thigh. It's a painful injury, and in the damp, 35-degree New England weather, it was even more painful. The leg throbbed and stiffened all afternoon, but Jim kept playing. The Bills knew he was hurt and chased him without pity. But he stayed in the entire game. He won even more respect from his new teammates.

“Jim loves to play football,” said his old friend Randy Vataha. “I knew the injury wouldn’t stop him. You’d have to drag him off the field before he’d quit. People don’t realize how strong he is.”

In the Buffalo game, Jim threw the ball a lot. He completed nine of 16 passes for 218 yards. More important, four of those passes were caught in the Buffalo end zone for scores. He brought his team from behind twice. The Patriots won, 38-33.

Everybody was impressed at the way Jim waited for the last split second before throwing two of his touchdown passes. If a quarterback throws too soon, his receiver may not be in the best position to catch the ball. If he waits, he has a better chance of completing the pass. He also has a better chance of being hit hard by the defense. But still Jim waited,

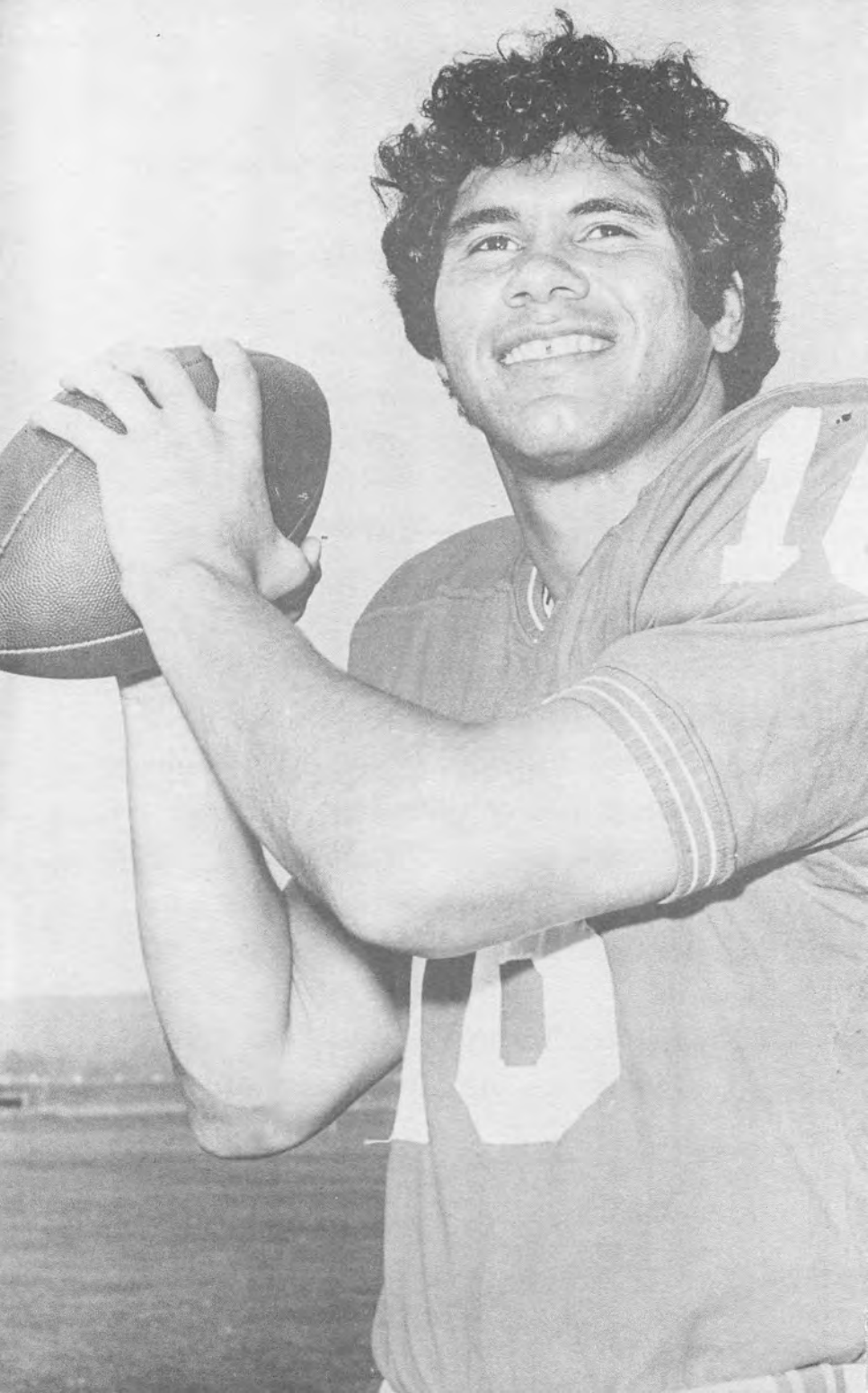
even with a bad leg. It took courage and a cool head.

Patriots center Jon Morris said: "Jim never complained about that leg all day. We all knew how much it was hurting him. But he kept throwing the football and connecting. You've really got to admire him."

By now, the Patriots had won four regular-season games. That was twice as many as the team won the entire season before. Jim had completed 91 of 203 passes, but 13 of his completions were good for touchdowns. Only eight of his passes were intercepted.

It was then that a reporter asked Jim how a rookie like himself steps in and becomes the leader of a pro team his first year.

"I just do what I've always done," Jim said. "I step into the huddle and call the



play with as much confidence as I can. And even when I'm not on the field I keep thinking about winning. No matter which team we play, I feel we're good enough to beat them."

But confidence doesn't always win ball-games. When Cleveland and Buffalo beat the Patriots in the next two games (road games) Jim and his teammates were worried. Now they had to play three very good teams—the Miami Dolphins, New York Jets and Baltimore Colts. Jim wanted to win these games very badly.

One good thing was that the team was coming home. The Patriots hadn't won a game on the road all year. But in Schaefer Stadium, they were tough.

Miami's Mercury Morris received the opening kickoff, and faked a couple of Patriot tacklers. Then he outran everybody else, all the way to a touchdown!

Morris had made a 95-yard touchdown run before the game was seconds old. It looked as though the Dolphins would have another easy win.

After the Miami kickoff, Jim Plunkett led the Patriot offensive unit onto the field. Jim had a determined look on his strong face. He was ready to beat the Dolphins. Up to now, he had started all his games by calling running plays. This is a safe way for a quarterback to begin. It lets him get the feel of the game.

Today was different. The first eight times Jim took the snap from center Jon Morris, he dropped back and threw the football. And eight times the pigskin settled in the hands of a Patriot receiver. The ninth play was a running play, and fullback Jim Nance carried into the end zone for a touchdown. The extra point was good, and the game was tied, 7-7.

Jim's great performance changed the

game around. Miami fumbled at its own 26-yard line. Jim came on again, took the football and promptly tossed a perfect touchdown pass to Vataha. The kick was good, and the Pats led, 14-7.

It was that kind of day. Jim was great all afternoon, and the rest of the Patriots followed his lead. When the final gun sounded to end the game, New England had beaten Miami, 34-13. As for Jim, he had completed 16 of 23 passes for 223 yards and two touchdowns.

At this point in Jim's rookie season, he had made 17 touchdown passes. The record for a rookie season is 22 touchdown passes. It was set by Charley Conerly of the New York Giants many years ago. But the second best record was 18. Two quarterbacks had done that: Joe Namath and Fran Tarkenton. Now Jim had a chance to pass them both.

The second-to-last game of the season

was a disappointment. The Pats were facing the New York Jets. Namath returned to action for the game, and the Patriots lost to the Jets, 13-6. But Broadway Joe didn't pass much. His team controlled the ball on the ground. Jim had a bad day. The Jet defenders chased him all afternoon. He took a bad beating, but kept trying. It wasn't good enough.

After the game, Jim said that Joe Namath was the best quarterback in the business. "He really has magic with that team," Jim said. "When he says 'jump,' they say 'how high?' "

Now there was only one game left. The Patriots would be meeting the tough Baltimore Colts. That week, the newspapers printed a story about Jim. If he played the whole game against the Colts, he'd be the first quarterback in NFL history to be in the lineup for every play



Jim (16) has always taken punishment like the pro he is.

of every game. It was hard to believe that Jim had worked that long without a break.

Well, Jim played the entire Colt game to set the record. And he was great. With his team leading, 14-10, and just minutes left, he took a chance. Instead of punting to the Colts and playing safe, Jim threw a long pass. The fans couldn't believe it. They held their breaths. Then Randy Vataha caught the ball and ran for another touchdown. The Patriots won, 21-10.

It was Jim's second touchdown pass of the game. That gave him 19 for the season. He had passed the rookie marks of Namath and Tarkenton! He now had the second-best rookie touchdown record of all time.

The Patriots had won six games and

lost eight. This wasn't a great record. But it was much better than the Patriots' score the previous season. Most people said that Jim played a big part in the team's success. He had passed the ball 328 times, completing 158 passes for 2,158 yards and 19 touchdowns. Jim had an outstanding first season.

In fact, the American Conference gave Jim the title of Rookie of the Year. And everyone said he would be a great quarterback very soon. Some thought he was great already.

But Jim knew that it takes a long time to become a great quarterback. There is so much to learn. During the off-season, he studied films of all the games.

"I want to see what I did wrong," he said. "And find ways to do things better. I've got to think faster on the field. The

Jim Plunkett has always
had a soft spot for the
kids.





other guys respect me now. They look to me as a leader. That means I've got to work to become a better player."

There were many people who praised Jim his rookie year. They knew he had a great throwing arm. They said he was cool under pressure. He learned the game quickly and he was a strong leader. And he was one of the nicest guys in the whole league.

"Jim's an amazing guy," said his friend and adviser, Bob Woolf. "There was tremendous pressure on him this past year. Everyone praised him. Everyone wanted to talk with him. But nothing changed him. He was open and friendly, and he never lost his temper or his patience. I've always told people that John Havlicek is the most high-class athlete I've ever met. But after knowing Jim this year, he comes very, very close."

Bob Woolf should know. Jim lived at Bob Woolf's home during the season. Everyone knew the pressure Jim would be under. If he stayed with Woolf, fewer people would be able to bother him. It can be very hard for a young star athlete. Many people want to talk to him and get his autograph and shake his hand. All that attention can make an athlete lose his concentration on the game.

But Jim didn't have to worry. He could concentrate entirely on football. His good friend, Randy Vataha, also stayed at Bob Woolf's home part of the year. The two often played pool with Woolf, or went out together on dates, often with Bob Woolf and his wife. Jim is fortunate to have a friend like Bob Woolf.

Jim has always had good friends. That's because he is a special kind of person. He is easy to like. He's a dedi-

cated athlete and a hard worker. He wants to be successful at whatever he does.

Someday Jim will come to the end of his football career. Then he'll probably be doing something that benefits others. He already works hard to help other Mexican-Americans. He urges these young people to continue their educations and go on to graduate school, to study law and medicine and other professions. That way, they can help other Mexican-Americans, too.

Jim Plunkett has traveled a long, rough road from his early years in San Jose. He's worked hard. Now he's a star quarterback in the National Football League. His goal is to lead his team to the championship.

Knowing Jim Plunkett, chances are that he'll make it.

JIM PLUNKETT'S COLLEGE STATISTICS

<i>Year</i>	<i>Att.</i>	<i>Comp.</i>	<i>Pct.</i>	<i>Yds.</i>	<i>TD</i>	<i>Int.</i>	<i>Ave. Gain</i>
1968	268	142	.529	2,156	14	14	8.04
1969	336	197	.586	2,673	20	15	7.95
1970	358	191	.533	2,715	18	16	7.58

JIM PLUNKETT'S PRO STATISTICS

1971	328	158	.482	2,158	19	16	6.58
1972	355	169	.476	2,196	8	25	6.18

Jim Plunkett

by Bill Gutman

Every young football fan will enjoy this easy-to-read biography of Jim Plunkett, the sensational young quarterback of the New England Patriots.

Jim Plunkett, a Mexican-American, grew up in California. Here are his childhood days, his high-school football stardom, and his career at Stanford University. Jim's excellence as Stanford's quarterback brought him the coveted Heisman Trophy, and helped Stanford win its first Rose Bowl game in twelve years. Here, too, are Jim Plunkett's struggles as a rookie quarterback with the faltering New England Patriots, and his contribution to the team's amazing improvement.

Profusely illustrated with action photographs, this book about Jim Plunkett will delight readers with an interest in football.